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AUTHOR Hesburgh, Theodore M.
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ABSTRACT

The role of voluntarism in America is considered by the President of the University of Notre Dame. It is suggested that Americans take voluntarism for granted and that its importance is not appreciated until comparisons are made to countries where everything is of, by, and for the state, even citizens and their rights. Before World War II, the federal involvement in education was minimal, about $60 million a year. After the war, when higher education enlarged, the federal government became its largest benefactor. Government loans were needed for academic buildings, research, and financial aid for students, among other areas. When federal support for education reached over $80 billion a year, regulators became important. It is suggested that too great a dependence on the government at the expense of voluntarism can unduly restrict freedom. A reasonable balance, where voluntarism and government aid are synergistic, working together rather than at cross-purposes, is advocated. Despite what many would call excessive federal involvement, some unique accomplishments have taken place (e.g., universal access to higher education and support of research and graduate education in universities). What is needed to maintain current gains in many critical areas is a partnership of voluntary and governmental efforts. Also a rebirth of voluntarism in new forms is desirable, as is a rebirth of collaboration between business and higher education. (SW)

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THE ROLE OF VOLUNTARISM IN AMERICA

Theodore M. Hesburgh, C.S.C.

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An address by
the Reverend Theodore M. Hesburgh, C.S.C.
President
University of Notre Dame

Before the
Business–Higher
Education Forum

Business–Higher
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One Dupont Circle, Suite 800
Washington, D.C. 20036
(202) 833-4716

in affiliation with the American Council on Education

One of the most perceptive tourists ever to visit America made his trip to our shores about 150 years ago (1831). His name was Alexis de Tocqueville. On his return, he wrote two books, with a five-year interval between them although they bear the same title: *Democracy in America.*

De Tocqueville had many acute observations about America in these books, but I take for my theme today, something he says in the second volume, something that has proved to be one of the most important realities that makes America what it is, a country unique in all the world. A century and a half have enriched the reality he describes, so that it is even more important today than it was then. But first, let us hear from de Tocqueville in his own words:

> Americans of all ages, all conditions, and all dispositions constantly form associations. They have not only commercial and manufacturing companies, in which all take part, but associations of a thousand other kinds, religious, moral, serious, futile, general or restricted, enormous or diminutive. The Americans make associations to give entertainment, to found seminaries, to build inns, to construct churches, to diffuse books, to send missionaries to the antipodes; in this manner, they found hospitals, prisons and schools. If it is proposed to inculcate some truth or to foster some feeling by the encouragement of a great

> example, they form a society. Wherever at the head of some new undertaking you see the government in France, or a man of rank in England, in the United States you will be sure to find an association.
>
> (*Democracy in America*, vol. II, p. 114, Vintage Books)

What de Tocqueville was describing, today we call voluntarism. I doubt that even he could have imagined to what extent this impulse was to build the America we know, in the next century and a half. All of the early institutions of higher education, including mine, are the result of voluntarism. All of our churches, most of our hospitals, all of our businesses, all of our labor unions, all of our newspapers, radio and television stations, all of our clubs, all of our professional associations, all of our political parties, all of our opera, symphonies, and ballet companies, all of our entertainment, movies, and theater, all of our athletic teams, professional and amateur, all of our transport system, all of our artistic endeavors — in a word, almost the total fabric of our society was initiated, developed, and maintained by voluntary activity in the private sector. We even have, at least for the moment, a voluntary Armed Forces. The

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voluntary support for all of this in gifts last year totaled over $40 billion. No one could possibly calculate the monetary value of the volunteered services involved.

If you wish to see how unique this makes America, visit a Communist or Socialist society, Russia, China, or Czechoslovakia. There the society is gray, monochromatic, not multicolored. If you read a paper, it is government issue; so are radio and television. If you do business, you do it with a government entity. Olympic athletes are government employees; so are all transport services. If you join a club, it is government sponsored and supported. To the extent that churches are allowed, so are they. All higher education, admissions, curricula, professional and administrative appointments, are made by the government. Clubs, associations (to use de Tocqueville's word), hotels, entertainment, hospitals, artistic and cultural activities are an arm of the government. So are, especially, political parties of which there is only one. A famous Jugoslavian sculptor on our faculty for a decade before his death, Ivan Mestrovic, used to say that elections were free in his native land and that one had three choices, Joseph, or Broz, or Tito, all being the same person.

We take voluntarism so much for granted in America that its importance is really not appreciated until we compare our way of life to that in countries where everything is of the state, by the state, and for the state—even citizens and their rights.

The point might be more forceful here if I were to put to you an interesting question. Suppose that tomorrow the most expensive multibillion-dollar endeavor in our land, the federal government, were to suddenly be inactivated. What would be the effect, the impact on your life? I suspect it would be enormously less than if all voluntary associations were suddenly eliminated.

May I make of myself a guinea pig for the moment, to test this hypothesis. I was born in a private hospital and grew up with private medical care, in a private home, not a government apartment. I was supported by money earned by

my father, who worked for a private concern, the Pittsburgh Plate Glass Company. I attended private schools for twenty-three years: parochial elementary and high schools, and three private universities. I was a Boy Scout, swam during the icy Syracuse winters at the YMCA, went to summer Scout camp, played on a neighborhood football team, went to a church founded and supported voluntarily (thanks to the First Amendment—an act of genius to launch voluntarism in the religious realm), joined a

"What political power could ever carry on the vast multitude of lesser undertakings which American citizens perform every day?"

private religious order, taught and administered in a private university. Because I took the vow of poverty, all of my income goes to private causes, one fourth to the Order and three fourths to the University. I belong to a variety of voluntary professional organizations, including this one, and many private clubs. I have served the government in a multiplicity of roles from commissioner to ambassador, mostly without pay, because it seemed more fitting to volunteer my services.

Take the voluntary element out of this one life, and there is practically nothing left. De Tocqueville was right when he said, "What political power could ever carry on the vast multitude of lesser undertakings which American citizens perform every day!" (Vol. II, p. 116) All of you have had similar experiences in your own lives, and you are all here tonight, again in an important voluntary capacity. All our lives, as presently lived, are inconceivable without the large involvement of voluntary associations, voluntary gifts, and voluntary services.

If you agree with me that all of this voluntarism is good for America and Americans, may I then suggest to you that increasingly, in the pre-Reagan years, we faced a counter-movement that strikes at the heart of what has made America great and unique. Despite our history of voluntarism, despite our unique record of doing by and for ourselves what needs doing, I sense that there had increasingly grown up a tendency to say, "Let the government do it." I say in all earnestness that when the government does it, the doing is almost always more costly, less free, more complicated, and generally less productive and effective for America and Americans.

We pride ourselves on being the land of the free. Free men and women in America have exercised their freedom broadly by doing for themselves that which needed doing. To the extent that we said, "Let the government do it," we were bartering away our freedom and generally paying for inefficiency and undue regulation, akin to that suffered in Socialist states.

All this may seem to be overstated, so allow me to be more explicit. Before World War II, the federal involvement in education was minimal, about $60 million a year. After the war, when we were tripling in three decades

. . . a new breed called regulators, accountable really to no one but themselves for their interpretation of the law, which was often far from that intended by the lawmakers.

what we had achieved in three centuries of higher education, the federal government became our largest benefactor. In general, this seemed to all of us to be a good development. We needed government loans for academic

buildings; we needed large research grants in science and technology. We needed scholarship help for the ever-growing number of students who otherwise would be unable, financially, to attend our universities. We needed medical grants, capitation assistance, library subsidies.

When all of this federal support for education had grown to over $80 billion a year, suddenly a wide variety of special-interest people began to descend on our campuses. They were not members of the three branches of government, judicial, executive, or legislative, but a new breed called regulators, accountable really to no one but themselves for their interpretation of the law, which was often far from that intended by the lawmakers.

They were regulating health, environment, women's rights, minority rights, OSHA, ERISA, employment beyond the age of sixty-five, Title IX applied to athletics, IRS looking at unrelated income, and a whole spate of good causes that are only concerned with a single issue and unrelated to the common good of the whole endeavor.

We have discussed this situation, in this body, and through our action we have begun to see some improvement. This year's (1981) *Federal Register* will have about 20,000 fewer pages of regulations than last year's (1980).

The central point I want to make is, however, somewhat different and perhaps more philosophical. As mentioned previously, not only is voluntarism one of the highest exercises of our freedom as a people, but also too great a dependence on the government at the expense of voluntarism is one of the best ways to see our freedom unduly restricted. One can say this while still admitting that there are broad areas where reasonable regulation will always be needed: such as air traffic, food and drug standards, and many others.

All this discussion could possibly lead one to an untenable general presumption: that we have to choose between voluntarism and gov-

ernment involvement. My point is different. It is quite easy to contemplate too much government involvement in our lives and the life of our institutions and our society. We have all seen that on occasion. It is difficult to imagine too much voluntarism, but its influence, however widespread, is not omnipotent, given our problems and opportunities. The temptation today,

My point is in favor of reasonable balance, to see voluntarism and government aid as synergistic, working together, not at cross-purposes.

as we attempt "to get the government off our backs," is to imagine that voluntarism can operate, always and everywhere without government assistance. My point tonight is in favor of reasonable balance, to see voluntarism and government aid as synergistic, working together, not at cross-purposes.

Let me illustrate. About two years ago, in late October 1979, it became obvious for the first time that the Cambodian people were facing extinction. Of a total population of eight million, three million were brutally killed by the Pol Pot regime, and one million were at the Thai border, sick, hungry, dying, without medicine, food, or shelter. The other four million in Kampuchea were eating grass and tree bark, without even seed to plant because they had eaten it.

We immediately mobilized the private sector of voluntary agencies, religious and secular, operating in crisis areas overseas. To get started we needed about $60 million which, fortunately, we were able to convince the government to provide. We then sent our forces into the field, at the border and within Cambodia, to begin the relief and rehabilitation

effort. In four months, we raised $70 million additional in private money, and about $500 million in public money from governments. The battle was won in a year; the total effort was both public and private. A whole people, the creators of Angkor Wat when Europe was in the Dark Ages, was saved. We did it together. Voluntarism, however important in mobilizing and organizing the total effort, was not able to do it alone. We did it together.

My point tonight is that there are some great and pressing problems in higher education today that require collaboration between our universities and colleges and federal government. Neither voluntarism nor state action is enough to meet certain central and very important requirements of our nation. I shall speak of two such endeavors that require doing it together, despite some of the current political rhetoric.

First, may I specify the two most important functions of higher education that, above all else, justify our task today: the achievement of quality in the education of the next generation, and equality of educational opportunity for all our young people, especially those traditionally deprived. These are not casual goals. They are at the heart of America and of our total educational endeavor. Voluntarism and private support can assist greatly in the achievement of these goals, but I do not believe that alone, without government assistance, can they make this American dream come true.

The positive and exhilarating point is that we have, up to now, in large measure made this dream come true. For the first time in the history of any nation, we have, through federal help and university collaboration, made it possible for any motivated student accepted at any of our best institutions, to matriculate there, or wherever else he or she was qualified to study. With a racial challenge as great as in any other nation on earth, greater than most, we came to the point several years ago when the percentage of black high school graduates attending college

was as high as the percentage of white graduates. This was no small achievement, but it signaled a high point in collaboration between federal assistance and university efforts to recruit minorities. Will this success continue? Not

The quality of higher education is directly related to the ability of institutions to engage in basic research, with correlative education of students who engage in this research.

without the massive federal support that first made it possible. It should be noted that the current movement in Washington is to lower this important student financial assistance (even as regards loans) disproportionately compared to other budget cuts.

The quality of higher education is directly related to the ability of institutions to engage in basic research, with correlative education of students who engage in this research. We found out during World War II that we were almost totally dependent upon European science and scientists to make the required breakthroughs in nuclear energy, penicillin, and other basic research achievements. After the war, Vannevar Bush in his seminal book, *Science, The Endless Frontier,* succeeded in persuading the government to found the National Science Foundation in 1950, to fund basic research in our universities. I joined the National Science Board in 1954 when the Foundation had a budget of $6 million. Twelve years later, when I left the Board, thanks mainly to Sputnik, we were at $600 million, and today we have just passed a billion-dollar budget.

Even in this important area, the pressure is on the National Science Foundation to downgrade basic research in favor of applied research, and the graduate student support in science and engineering is also under constant

downward pressure. Again, we in the voluntary area have the will and the capacity, but often we lack the adequate support from both public and private sectors.

A few figures will put this qualitative element of American education in perspective. Total national expenditures for research and development, as a proportion of GNP, declined 24 percent between 1964 and 1977, rising only 1 percent in the last three years. Federal expenditures for research and development declined by 43 percent from 1964 to 1980. While

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university research support declined, United States business and industry spent $38 billion on research and development during 1979, a one-year growth of 13 percent. This private research was 70 percent of the total United States research and development. The last year's research and development budget of one company, General Electric, was 60 percent greater than the total National Science Foundation budget. Obviously, this shrinking of university research and development and graduate student support will profoundly affect America's future (see Boyer and Hechinger, *Higher Education in the Nation's Service*, Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, pp. 36–37).

Vannevar Bush put it best, many years ago in the book mentioned above:

> The publicly and privately supported colleges, universities and research institutes are the centers of basic research. They are the

> wellsprings of knowledge and understanding. As long as they are vigorous and healthy and their scientists free to pursue the truth wherever it may lead, there will be a flow of new scientific knowledge to those who can apply it to practical problems of government, or in industry, or elsewhere.
> (*Science, The Endless Frontier*, pp. 18–19, U.S. Government Printing Office, 1945)

What do I conclude from all of this?

1. America at its very best is a widespread exercise in voluntarism. This generous impulse, so unknown in Socialist or Communist societies, becomes diminished when government becomes too involved, particularly from the federal to the local and state levels. This had been happening, precipitously, but now seems to be in reversal.

2. The conventional wisdom today is that as the federal government withdraws its massive support, the private voluntary effort, as well as the state and local effort, will somehow take up the slack. In its most optimistic form, this thesis reverts to a former, supposedly golden age, when all that is now done by the federal government, was done by voluntary activity and so proposes that substitution of private for public activity can best solve present problems.

3. The fact is that despite what many would call excessive federal involvement, some unusual and unique accomplishments took place, for example, universal access to higher education and a newly born post-World War II support of research and graduate education in universities that resulted in the transfer of scientific leadership from the Old World to the New, as best evidenced in our quasi-monopoly of Nobel Prize winners.

4. Given the present historical moment, what is needed to maintain current gains in many critical areas is a partnership of voluntary and governmental endeavors for the good of America when that is demonstrable. Also one would hope for a rebirth of voluntarism, in many new, imaginative, and creative forms.

5. Finally, and most germane to this assembly, we look for a rebirth of collaboration between business and higher education on a variety of fronts where we make common cause. In the crucial area of research, graduate education, and development, it is clear that collaboration will not always be without complications, since business must be concerned with profit and applied research whereas higher education's heart and soul require basic research, open attribution of ideas, and published research results for peer evaluation, and constant forward motion. However, this is where creativity and imagination come into play, and this is the university's stock in trade, its finest product. It is also what achieved greatness for American industry, so on this level of imagination and creativity, I am sure that we will find a road upward that we can walk together.

Theodore M. Hesburgh, C.S.C.
January 15, 1982

The Reverend Theodore M. Hesburgh, C.S.C.

Father Hesburgh is in his thirtieth year as President of the University of Notre Dame. His many-faceted role as leader in education, government, and public affairs is symbolized by the Medal of Freedom – the nation's highest civilian honor – awarded him in 1964 by President Johnson.

His principal contributions have been in the areas of civil rights and international development. President Eisenhower appointed him in 1957 to the U. S. Commission on Civil Rights, of which he was chairman, 1969 – 72. He has served on President Ford's Clemency Board, 1974 – 75, and on the President's General Advisory Committee on Foreign Assistance. A most recent Presidential appointment, under President Carter, was as chairman of the Select Commission on Refugee and Immigration Policy.

As a board member of the Chase Manhattan Bank, a position he left in 1981, he emphasized investment by transnational corporations in underdeveloped countries. He became a trustee of the Rockefeller Foundation in 1963 and chairman of its board in 1977.

Father Hesburgh, in August 1979, was U. S. ambassador heading the delegation to a United Nations conference on the transfer of technology from developed to undeveloped countries. In other public service activities he has been cochairman of the Citizens' Committee for Immigration Reform, chairman of the Overseas Development Council, and a director of the Council on Foreign Relations. He has also been president of the International Federation of Catholic Universities, served Pope Paul VI and his two predecessors as permanent Vatican City representative to the International Atomic Energy Agency in Vienna, 1956 – 70, and was appointed to the Holy See's delegation to the 29th session of the U.N. General Assembly.

Father Hesburgh is an elected member of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences, the National Academy of Education, and the American Philosophical Society.